

Fisheries resources: recovery of Southern hake and Norway lobster stocks

2003/0318(CNS) - 23/12/2003 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE : to amend regulation 850/98/EC and to establish a plan for the recovery of the southern hake and Norway lobster stocks in the Cantabrian Sea and western Iberian Peninsula. **PROPOSED ACT** : Council Regulation. **CONTENT** : Recent scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) has indicated that the Southern hake and Norway lobster stocks in ICES divisions VIIIC and IXA have been subjected to levels of mortality by fishing which have eroded the quantities of mature individuals in the sea to the point at which the stocks may not be able to replenish themselves by reproduction and that the stocks are therefore threatened with collapse. The objective of this recovery plan is to ensure the recovery of the stocks to within safe biological limits within a time frame of five to ten years. This proposal is written in six chapters: Chapter I sets out which stocks are covered by this proposal and lays down the criteria for reaching the objectives of the plan. Chapter II sets out for the southern hake stock what the maximum fishing mortality rate should be to ensure its recovery within the chosen time frame. The total allowable catch will then be calculated based on this. For Norway lobster the total allowable catch will be set such that the resulting reduction in fishing is equivalent in relative terms to that of southern hake. Scientists have indicated that while the estimated relative development in the size of the southern hake stock is accurate the estimates of the absolute sizes of this stock are uncertain. No estimates for absolute stock sizes are available for the Norway lobster stocks. Scientists have therefore advised that biomass reference points should not be used as targets for recovery and instead suggested to express the recovery targets in terms of fishing mortality rates. The fishing mortality reference point F0.1, which is based on yield per recruit criteria and therefore robust to changes in absolute estimates of stock size, has been chosen as recovery limit. F0.1 is sufficiently low to give, if achieved, a high probability of recovery. The target mortality rates will be achieved by reducing the fishing effort gradually over time and setting the TACs so that recovery is likely to be achieved within the same time scale as that proposed for the cod recovery plans, namely around five to ten years. In any case, F0.1 is a limit, not a target. This means that recovery can be achieved, and the recovery plan finalised, when the stocks are considered to be within safe biological limits, regardless of whether the limit of F0.1 has been reached. The chapter also sets out the details of the principle that the largest annual change, upwards or downwards, in any TAC from one year to the next should not be greater than 15% after the first year of implementation of a recovery plan. On the first year, these limits are increased to 25% to allow for a possible higher first recovery step. Chapter III contains the Commission's proposals for the management of a fishing effort limitation scheme - i.e. restricting the time that the fishing vessels concerned may spend fishing to correspond with the TAC's. The system is the same as proposed in the cod recovery plan giving flexibility to Member States in management and allocation of fishing effort to individual fishing vessels. The system works as follows: - first the overall historical fishing effort of all vessels catching southern hake and/or Norway lobster is calculated; - then the reduction in fishing effort, relative to the effort in the reference period, required to match the selected TAC is calculated and allocated to Member States in proportion to each Member States share of the total landings of Southern hake and taking into account differences in catchability. Member States will distribute these effort limits, expressed in kilowatt-days, among their vessels. They will be fully transferable and usable at any time throughout the year. Chapter IV provides for measures in relation to improved monitoring, inspection and control for the vessels covered by the effort management system. These measures include details of prior notification, the requirement to land sole in designated ports and stowage and transport conditions. Chapter V outlines the technical measures that will be implemented to supplement those above such as closed areas and the enhancement of gear selectivity in the main fisheries. The conservation merit of existing national measures has been considered. The measures implemented by this Regulation for the recovery of southern hake and Norway lobster stocks directly affect those fishing for associated species in relation to the proposed effort limitation scheme. It should be noted that, although no direct reference is

made in the Regulation, there will also be consequences in relation to the Total Allowable Catches for other species and stocks associated with these stocks.